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Letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Spain and the United Kingdom, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security of the Security Council, would like to share a summary note of the meeting held on 15 June 2016 on the situation regarding women, peace and security in the Central African Republic (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations

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Ambassador
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Annex to the letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Summary of the meeting of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security on the Central African Republic on 15 June 2016

On 15 June, the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security was briefed by the Deputy Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Diane Corner, who was accompanied by the Gender Adviser, Gladys Teni Atinga, the Senior Women Protection Adviser, Beatrix Attinger Colijn, and the Head of the Human Rights Division of the Mission, Musa Gassama.

The Deputy Special Representative stated that women suffered disproportionately from the consequences of the conflict in the Central African Republic, including an increase in widowhood and women-headed households, an adverse impact on their livelihoods, increased sexual and gender-based violence, the violent targeting of women based on accusations of witchcraft and their increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse. She noted that gender had been mainstreamed as a cross-cutting issue throughout the mandate of MINUSCA, with an emphasis on women's participation and protection. Since late 2014, MINUSCA had strongly advocated a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women in national consultation processes, which had been accepted by partners and taken on by the Government. MINUSCA had also developed a database consisting of profiles of professional women suitable for leadership roles in a range of fields and had assisted in the development of the draft gender parity law. She emphasized that it was essential that women participate in the national reconciliation process and stated that the Mission was working with the Minister of Social Affairs, whose portfolio included gender and reconciliation, to ensure that women were involved in transitional justice processes. MINUSCA was also working to improve access to justice for women, end impunity for crimes relating to witchcraft accusations and remove witchcraft from the Penal Code, as well as invigorate the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, as secretariat of the Informal Experts Group, provided a list of recommendations relating to furthering the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in the Central African Republic through MINUSCA, the Government and the Security Council, in particular in the light of the upcoming strategic review of the Mission. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict noted challenges in engaging and enforcing compliance with the full range of perpetrators and highlighted three thematic issues: sexual violence as a cause and consequence of displacement, the stigma associated with children born of rape and sexual violence against men and boys, which is often overlooked in reporting and programming.

In response to questions from members of the Security Council, United Nations participants in Bangui and New York noted the following:

(a) Several factors had resulted in a reduction of women represented in national institutions since the transition period, notwithstanding the large numbers of women turning out to vote, which included the reassertion of the prevailing norms of gender inequality in society into the democratic process (in contrast to the transition period, when a woman President was appointed), women's lack of access to financial resources when campaigning, the multiple cancellation of elections and a low literacy rate among women;

(b) While the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme would include women combatants and women associated with armed groups, the complementary community violence reduction programme, which would target 80,000 people, would have a greater focus on women. MINUSCA had successfully advocated for the allocation of 35 per cent of community violence reduction projects to women. It was expected that such projects will reduce violence in the community, including domestic violence, and establish livelihood opportunities for women. MINUSCA was also working towards ensuring that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform are gender-sensitive and that women were represented more fairly on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform committees;

(c) In addressing concerns regarding the wide disparity between cases of sexual and gender-based violence (60,000 from January to October 2015) and conflict-related sexual violence (79 in 2015), MINUSCA noted that the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangement continued to be rolled out in the country and that it was working with the Government, police and partner organizations to improve accuracy in the number of reported cases. Conflict-related sexual violence remained severely underreported owing to the stigmatization of rape, the absence of justice, informal settlements with perpetrators and the high threshold for cases to be verified and documented. The United Nations Population Fund faced challenges with 12 partner organizations in gender-based violence information management systems, given that only 8 organizations provided figures and that there remained varying thresholds in registering gender-based cases among partners;

(d) While 28 per cent of the civilian component of the Mission was women, the corresponding figures for the military and police components were very low compared with the global average (1.3 per cent and 2.7 per cent, respectively). The Deputy Special Representative recognized that there was a need for troop-contributing countries to increase the representation of women in those components and that it was also important in tackling sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Deputy Special Representative suggested that the next Security Council resolution renewing the mandate of MINUSCA should include language on increasing the number of women military and police officers and women's representation in national spheres; and an insistence on gender parity. In general, she considered women, peace and security to be fairly well embedded in the Mission, pointing to senior women such as herself and the Director of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section and the current Gender Adviser, but agreed that more could be done to advance the agenda.

The Co-Chairs of the Informal Experts Group reiterated their thanks to the Deputy Special Representative and highlighted the importance of having increased information on the implementation of women, peace and security in the Central African Republic communicated to the Security Council through regular briefings and reporting, as called for in resolutions 2122 (2013), 2217 (2015) and 2242 (2015). They asked MINUSCA to identify some specific goals relating to women, peace and security topics previously discussed that could be achieved in the coming 6 to 12 months and beyond, on which the Group would follow up. A second, more focused meeting of the Group on the Central African Republic would be held before the end of 2016.